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Source: *Diderot Studies*, 1973, Vol. 16 (1973), pp. 15-21

Published by: Librairie Droz

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A NOTE ON THE ENGLISH PIRACIES OF *LA RELIGIEUSE* AND *JACQUES LE FATALISTE*, 1797

By Giles BARBER

Throughout the eighteenth century a growing proportion of the English book-reading public was keenly interested in the latest developments on the French literary scene. At first certain booksellers ordered or received new works of importance through booksellers in the Low Countries, then closer and more immediate links were established with French publishers and booksellers and finally some firms became specialised in this particular trade with the result that in the early nineteenth century some French firms even set up branches in London. In the middle of the eighteenth century English translations of successful works were frequently produced at a speed which can not be matched today. However, not content with this English booksellers, as yet unrestricted by the problems of international copyright, often found it worthwhile to reprint the work in its original French in England so as to have enough copies to hold the interest of the public until their English translation was ready. The two most famous cases of this technique are those of *Candide* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*¹. It would seem likely that it was also employed for *La Religieuse* and *Jacques le fataliste* and it is the aim of this note to document this,

¹ See for example my note, "Two English editions of *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761" in the *Modern Language Review*, LVI (1961), pp. 225-228.

thus also allowing the very close English piracy to be identified from the original Paris first edition.

It is well known that manuscript copies of the two texts were circulating in Europe in the early 1790s and that German translations of at least part of the latter work had appeared from as early as 1785. The full original French texts were eventually published in Paris in 1796 as a result of negotiations between the Institut national and Prince Henry of Prussia who finally made his manuscript copy of the two works available to the French. As Professor Georges May has recorded the two works were published separately by Jacques Buisson and announced in the *Décade philosophique, littéraire et politique* on 11 October 1796². The following day, “Le primidi 21 vendémiaire an V”, the *Journal de France de politique et de littérature* bore the following announcement:

“LIVRES NOUVEAUX. — La *Religieuse*, ouvrage posthume de Diderot, 1 vol. in-8, de plus de 400 pages, imprimé sur papier carré fin, et caractères de cicéro Didot. Prix broché 41. et 51. franc de port par la poste pour les départements et pays conquis. A Paris, chez Buisson, libraire, rue Haute-Feuille, n° 20. On affranchit l’argent et la lettre d’avis.”

The first review was that of Jean-Jacques Leuliette in the *Annales patriotiques et littéraires*, a paper itself published by the bookseller Buisson, on 24 vendémiaire (15 October) but other reviews only date from the end of October.

The reception of the two works varied, the one having evidently something of a *succès de scandale*, but by early January 1797 at least *La Religieuse* had been reprinted by another Parisian publisher, Gueffier, who also produced an edition of *Jacques le fataliste*. Numerous later editions are listed in the standard bibliographies. It would appear

² Georges May, *Diderot et ‘La Religieuse’* (New Haven, 1954), ch. 1.

however that remarkably close facsimiles, purporting to be the original editions, were produced in England and it is with these that this note is concerned.

The closeness of the imitations makes it advisable to give first a brief description of the genuine Paris first editions. The titlepage of *La Religieuse* reads: LA / RELIGIEUSE. / PAR DIDEROT. / [short rule of 2.4 cm.] / A PARIS, / Chez BUISSON, Imprimeur-Libraire, rue / Haute-Feuille, n^o. 20. / [short rule of 2.5 cm.] / AN CINQUIÈME DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE. The collation of the octavo volume is: $\pi^2A-2B^82C^6$; pp. 1-4, 1 2 - 411 412. The only difference at once visible between this and the English imitation is that in the latter both the short rules are thick and thin double rules, measuring 7.5 and 2.7 cm. respectively. There is also no full point after the "n^o" of number in the last line of the imprint. The collation of the English edition is $\pi^2A-2B^82C^62D^8$; pp. 1-4.1 2 — 411 412.

The two editions of *Jacques le fataliste* are equally similar. The title page of the Paris edition reads: JACQUES / LE FATALISTE / ET SON MAITRE. / PAR DIDEROT. / [short rule of 2.35 cm.; vol. 2, 2.80 cm.] / TOME PREMIER [SECOND]. / [short rule of 2.50 cm.; vol. 2, 2.90 cm.] / A PARIS, / Chez BUISSON, Imprimeur-Libraire, rue / Haute-Feuille, n^o. 20. / [short rule of 3.20 cm.; vol. 2, 3.05 cm.] / AU CINQUIÈME DE LA RÉPUBLIQUE. / The collation of the two octavo volumes is: π^2a-b^8 , A-S⁸; π^2A-V^8 ; pp. 1-4 i-xxij 23 24-286; 1-4, 1 2-320. The only easily recognisable differences on the London edition's title-page are that the initial J drops below the base line of the rest of JACQUES, that the tail of the Q cuts into the internal space of the letter, and that the two accented letters in the date line are smaller than the other letters of that line.

Equally both Paris editions bear on the verso of the title-page both lengthy references to the new French legislation on copyright and the signature of the publisher. The

statement on *La Religieuse* quotes several articles of the decree while that on *Jacques le fataliste* is more in the form of a general warning and reads as follows :

“ Décret concernant les Contrefacteurs rendu le 19 juillet 1793, l’an 2 de la République.

Je place la presente Édition sous la Sauve-garde des Loix et de la probité des Citoyens. Je déclare que je poursuivrai devant les Tribunaux tout Contrefacteur, Distributeur ou Débitant d’Édition contrefaite. J’assure meme au Citoyen qui me fera connoître le Contrefacteur, Distributeur ou Débitant, la moitié du dédommagement que la Loix accorde. Paris, ce 5 vendémiaire, l’an 5 de la République Française, une et indivisible. Buisson.” This warning seems to have been highly unsuccessful although it should be noted that the English pirates did not push their scrupulously close imitation so far as to include this !

There is however one additional feature which proves conclusively that the second of these editions was printed in England and that is the presence throughout these volumes of the small numerals appearing in the signature line once or twice per gathering and known as “ press figures.” These numerals were regularly used by British printers in the eighteenth century to indicate which press or press team had printed that particular sheet or forme³. The use of these figures would appear to have been a purely British custom and no book with such figures has yet been proved to have been printed on the Continent.

The table for the appearance of these figures in *La Religieuse* is as follows: pp. 6 (A3^v)4; 28 (B6^v)4; 44 (C6^v)4; 61 (D7)1; 80 (E8^v)5; 89 (F5)5; 104 (G4^v)5; 118 (H3^v)5; 121 (H5)4; 141 (17)4; 160 (K8^v)5; 170 (L5^v)5; 188 (M6^v)5; 204 (N6^v)5; 206

³ See my article “ Catchwords and press figures at home and abroad,” *The Book Collector*, 9 (1960), pp. 301-307.

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(N7^v)1; 215 (04^v)1; 222 (07^v)5; 238 (P7^v)5; 255 (Q8)5; 256 (Q8^v)4; 268 (R6)1; 270 (R7^v)4; 286 (S7^v)5; 288 (S8^v)1; 290 (T1^v)5; 296 (T4^v)4; 315 (V6)1; 320 (V8^v)4; 334 (X7^v)4; 344 (Y4^v)5; 367 (Z8)5; 376 2A4^v)5; 382 (2A7^v)4; 399 (2B8)4; 405 (2C3)5.

Those appearing in *Jacques le fataliste* are as follows: Volume 1, pp. xiv (a7^v)3; 32 (b8^v)1; 64 (D8^v)2; 74 (E5^v)2; 93 (F7)2; 112 (G8^v)2; 125 (H7)2; 130 (I1^v)3; 132 (I2^v)2; 160 (K8^v)1; 171 (L6)2; 176 (L8^v)1; 179 (M2)2; 203 (N6)2; 224 (08)3; 240 (P8^v)2; 242 (Q1^v)1; 271 (R8)2; 272 (R8^v)1; 283 (S6)1; volume 2, p. 32 (B8^v)3; 48 (C8^v)2; 54 (D3^v)1; 56 (D4^v)2; 70 (E3^v)1; 76 (E6^v)2; 91 (F6)2; 92 (F6^v)3; 102 (G3^v)2; 104 (G4^v)1; 121 (H5)1; 130 (I1^v)3; 144 (J8^v)1; 148 (K2^v)2; 150 (K3^v)3; 164 (L2^v)2; 175 (L8)2; 196 (N2^v)2; 210 (O1^v)1; 221 (O7)3; 239 (P8)3; 252 (Q6^v)1; 255 (Q8)1; 260 (P2^v)2; 303 (T8)3; 304 (T8^v)2; 306 (V1^v)3.

Further corroborative evidence of the English origins of these editions which can be adduced includes the fact that many copies are to be found in contemporary bindings in a typically English half calf style with marbled paper boards and that these often show early British provenances.

The background to the production of these editions can be guessed, though not proven, from *advertissements* in the English press. The first trace of either *La Religieuse* or *Jacques le fataliste* found so far in the London newspapers comes in the form of an advertisement in the *London Chronicle* of 7-9 February 1797 and reads:

“Next week will be published 1. James the Fatalist and his Master 2 The Nun. Novels from the French of the late DIDEROT. The Posthumous Works of the celebrated DIDEROT were presented to the National Institute of France, by Prince Henry of Prussia, and have excited the greatest interest upon the Continent. Printed for G. G. and J. Robinson, Paternoster-Row. Of whom may be had, the original French of both the above works.”

The tale of the English translation is in fact only taken up a month later when one reads in the *London Chronicle* of 7-9 March the announcement “This day were published,

1. James the Fatalist and his Master. Three volumes, 12s. sewed. 2. The Nun. Novels from the French of the Late Diderot...". *James the Fatalist* was subsequently summarised at length and reviewed by "R. R." in the *London Review* for June 1797.

It is the contention of this note that this is another of those occasions when English publishers-importers-book-sellers, having obtained a copy or copies of a work clearly beginning to have a success on the Continent, at once commissioned an English translation. Furthermore, and although their English translation could finally appear in as little as five months from the date of the original French first edition they may well have tried to hold the interest on the English market by reprinting the French text, in French, in England. The phrase in the advertisement of 7 February 1797 saying "Of whom may be had the original French" could suggest that such a reprinted edition was in fact available at that date. This London facsimile edition would therefore have appeared only shortly after the reprint published in Paris by Gueffier *jeune* and Knapen *frs* and advertised in the *Mercure de France* on 29 January 1797. It is not known what copyright arrangements, if any, were made between Buisson, the original publisher, and Gueffier and Knapen but if the two to three months from original publication could allow for a reprint in Paris they could evidently also suffice in London. Moreover in the competitive and fairly free reprint market of the late eighteenth century speed was essential and there would probably have been little point in producing a facsimile first edition in England after the appearance of the English translation. There is therefore enough evidence to suggest that these piracies probably appeared in early February 1797.

From a textual point of view the pirates seem to have produced a remarkably satisfactory edition. French compositors are known to have been at work in England throughout the

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eighteenth century and from the Revolution on a not inconsiderable body of printing in French was done in London. A rapid examination of the texts suggests that they do not contain any extra passages or any deletions but that they faithfully reproduce the genuine first editions. Since however any reprinting may well introduce a number of unconscious variations scholars will presumably wish to be aware that in using the English piracy they are not in fact using the genuine first edition. Likewise it would seem that a number of libraries and collectors will also sadly wish to note that although they possess an interesting piracy they do not have the originals of these texts.⁴

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⁴ Among copies seen I have noted that the British Museum possesses the genuine first edition of *Jacques le fataliste* (shelfmark 12513 f. 6) and the Taylor Institution, Oxford, the English piracies of both *Jacques* and *La Religieuse*.